Merritt Parkway, Weston Road/Route 57 Bridge
Spanning Weston Road/Route 57 at the 21.69 mile mark
on the Merritt Parkway
Westport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-101

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Weston Road/Route 57 Bridge

HAER No. CT-101

Location:	Spanning Weston Road/Route 57 at the 21.69 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Westport, Fairfield County, Connecticut at exit 42 UTM: 18.637725.4558035 Quad: Westport, Connecticut
Construction Date:	1938
Engineer:	Connecticut Highway Department
Architect:	George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.
Contractor:	Peter Mitchell Construction Company Greenwich, Connecticut
Present Owner:	Connecticut Department of Transportation Wethersfield, Connecticut
Present Use:	Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross Weston Road/Route 57
Significance:	The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.
Historians:	Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1648, five settlers migrated west from the town of Fairfield and established homesteads along the Saugatuck River. Residents of Fairfield referred to this region as Green's Farms, because of John Green who settled there. The church referred to this region as the West Parish of Fairfield.[1] For the next century this rural community grew slowly. By the late 1700s the town was known as Saugatuck. In 1806, schooners started making weekly runs between Saugatuck and New York City. The town developed into a shipping center, with two shipyards. This was due in large part to the Saugatuck River which was navigable farther inland than any other stream in Fairfield County.[2]

In 1824, the parish of Saugatuck presented a petition of civic independence to Fairfield's town leaders. In 1835, the Connecticut legislature created the town of Westport from parts of Fairfield, Norwalk, and Weston.[3]

The arrival of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad in 1849, further bolstered the economy. "The building of the railroad ushered in a new era. The wharves along the Saugatuck disappeared as did the vessels that had for many years docked beside them. When the new railroad station for Westport was built, several factories opened in the vicinity."[4] Westport remains a manufacturing center to the present day.

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[1]Julie Haggeman, "Founding of West Parish of Fairfield." (Manuscript, Westport Public Library Vertical File), 1.

[2]Robert Adams, "Saugatuck History," (Manuscript, Westport Public Library Vertical File, 1968).

[3]Haggeman, 3.

[4]"Westport, Connecticut, a preliminary directive plan," prepared by the Section of City Planning, Department of Architecture, School of the Fine Arts, Yale University, 1947.

The completion of the Merritt Parkway enabled Westport to also become a bedroom community for New York City. Residents actively encouraged construction of the parkway in their town, especially when it appeared that the Merritt might follow a more northerly route through the communities of Wilton and Weston. Conflict did arise as the roadway was being constructed. Local business leaders were concerned that there would not be enough exits to give motorists access to Westport's commercial district. These fears were alleviated when the second section of the parkway to open, ended at Weston Road/Route 57, depositing all traffic onto Main Street. Civic leaders were then distressed by the congestion this generated in the business district. The problem was solved when the next link of the parkway opened to the Huntington Turnpike.[5]

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Historically, Weston Road/Route 57 was the primary link between the agricultural community of Weston and the port of Westport. In the spring of 1938, conflict arose just prior to the construction of the Weston Road/Route 57 Bridge. State Highway Commissioner John Macdonald and Public Works Administrator Robert Hurley had a disagreement over whether the bridges of the Merritt Parkway should be wide enough to allow the roadway to pass over or under the structure

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[5]"Westport Wants Entrance at Cross Highway, But Fairfield Opposed," Westporter-Herald, 18 November 1938, p. 1.

"The Newest Plan is For Traffic Leaving Parkway to Use Wilton Road; Those Entering Go Thru Narrow Main Street," Westporter-Herald, 9 December 1938, p. 1.

"Chamber of Commerce to Petition for Routing of Parkway Traffic Via Compo Road," Westporter-Herald, 10 January 1939, p. 1.

"Westport Chamber of Commerce Wants Traffic From Merritt Diverted Somewhere Besides Main Street," Westporter-Herald, 13 January 1939, p. 1.

"Cox Promises to Examine Ramp Issue." Westporter-Herald, 24 January 1939, p. 1.

without having to converge. This became known as the pinched bridge controversy. Governor Cross enlisted the help of former highway commissioner, Charles Bennett, to settle the dispute. It was decided that three of six bridges about to be built would be widened by ten feet, and that all future bridges would be wide enough to prevent convergence underneath them. The three bridges that were widened were the Wilton Road/Route 33, the Weston Road/Route 57, and the Cross Highway bridges.

Further controversy developed after the bridge was completed. On December 22, 1938, the second section of the Merritt Parkway opened, terminating at Weston Road/Route 57. Westport merchants did not want the Merritt to end at this intersection, because they feared that traffic would overload the Main Street commercial district. Furthermore, local community leaders were upset, because the state refused to pay for damage on Main Street caused by the increased traffic volume.[6]

The Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from the Newtown Turnpike to North Avenue, in Westport (ConnDot project #180-55). While Weston Avenue/Route 57 is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract was awarded to the Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT (ConnDot project #180-72).[7] The bridge cost $31,294 and was under construction from April 29, 1938, until the fall of that year. The paving contract for this region of the Merritt extended from the Newtown Turnpike to Easton Road/Route 136, in Westport. This contract was awarded to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT (ConnDot project# 180-100). The

[6]"The Newest Plan is For Traffic Leaving Parkway to Use Wilton Road; Those Entering Go Thru Narrow Main Street," Wesporter-Herald, 9 December 1938, p. 1.

[7]Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

Weston Road/Route 57 Bridge has received little maintenance since it was built. Recently, the bridge was defoliated and some spalling concrete was removed and patched.[8]

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Weston Road Bridge is a single-span, reinforced- concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge. The frame spans 48'-6" at a skew of 8°-14'-15" over the 45'-wide roadway. Parallel wing walls, 38'-4" and 43'-4" long, form the approach for the overpass. The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge on a clear roadway 67'-9" wide at a 1.8 percent grade.

The rigid-frame design allows the engineer to decrease the structural material at the center of the span, thus forming an arched opening. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The intrados of the span rises almost 4' from the springline to the crown. The extrados curves to increase the frame thickness from 18" at the crown to 3'-6" at the knee. The outside of the knee is curved, and the inside of the knee is a corner with an obtuse angle. The frame leg thickness increases from 2'-3" at the base to 3'-6" at the knee. The exposed face of the legs remains vertical, and the hidden face slopes away from the roadway.

The architecture of the Weston Road Bridge is characterized by vertical grooves and a crenelated parapet for a railing. The pylons are flush with the face of the wing walls and the bridge and are delineated only by three vertical grooves and a thickening of the parapet wall. These three grooves are repeated in four places under the bridge, where the grooves extend from one base over the arch to the other base. Each crenelation in the parapet contains one vertical groove in the center

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[8]Weston Road/Route 57 Bridge, DOT #730; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

of its face. A short vertical groove also occurs in the spandrel below the parapet, corresponding to the center of each crenelation.

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———. Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.